

Christmas Holiday Reading List 2019



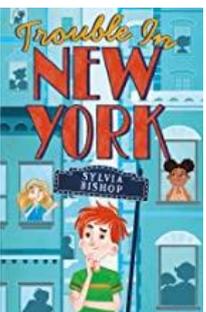
The Maker of Monsters by Lorraine Gregory

I put this on my new Great Books List this year, but not many boys have taken it out of the library yet (perhaps the cover is a little dull?). So I'm determined to try again, as I found this such a charming read. Brat has grown up on an island with a Frankenstein-like master who is using magic to create a monster army. When these evil creations take control of the island, Brat has to escape with his best (and only) friends, Tingle and Sherman (who are also 'monsters') to warn the outside world. Truly lovely book, with utterly delightful characters and a clever plot!



I, Cosmo by Carlie Sorosiak

A year 5 boy was so enthusiastic about this book that I had to buy it and read it to see what his enthusiasm was based on. And I'm glad I did; thank you Oliver! Narrated by Cosmo, a 13 year old golden retriever, this is a completely charming story of a dog who is aware that his family is falling apart and his beloved Max is unhappy. It is up to him to try to save them, even if that means learning to dance on his slightly arthritic legs! Funny and moving in equal measure, this is a lovely book for all and a must-read for anyone who loves dogs!



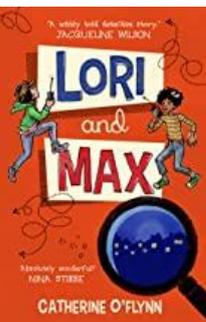
Trouble in New York by Sylvia Bishop

This author's previous book (*The Secret of The Night Train*) may be familiar to some readers, and her latest book is another well-written and witty detective story that is sure to appeal. Set in 1960s America, it is the story of Jamie, who has always wanted to be a reporter and is desperate to win the coveted Young Reporter of the Year award. A chance encounter puts him in the path of Harry Hooper the editor of the New Yorker, and then - through a series of twists, Jamie unwittingly finds himself caught up in a world where he encounters New York's most infamous villains. With a cast of appealing (and not-so-appealing!) characters, this atmospheric and clever mystery is thoroughly entertaining.



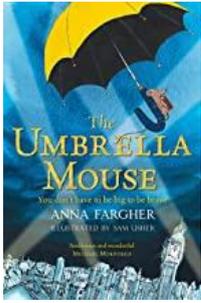
Asha & the Spirit Bird by Jasbinder Bila

This lovely debut novel was recently shortlisted for the Costa Children's Book Award and, as one reviewer wrote "If one of the gifts of fiction is to proffer unfamiliar footwear in which to walk a while, Bilan's story [has] one sandalled foot in atmospheric realism and a toe-hold in the mythical." Asha lives in the foothills of the Himalayas. Money is tight and to thwart the debt collector she decides to find her father, missing in the faraway city. She faces real danger as she journeys across the world's highest mountains, yet Asha has the unshakeable sense that the spirit bird of her grandmother will be watching over her. A richly evocative sense of place is coupled with terrific characters and plot and then sprinkled with a little bit of magic.



Lori and Max by Catherine O'Flynn

When money goes missing from the classroom new girl Max becomes the suspect. Her friend and wannabe detective Lori is determined to prove Max's innocence. When Max disappears, can Lori solve the mystery? This is quite a short book, but the drama it contains is completely compelling. It's a brilliant detective story, told from both girls' point of view, where the underlying social issues of bullying, addiction and poverty are very real but not the dominant theme. It is a story of friendship, loyalty and bravery that, in the end, allow both girls to step out of the shadow of 'being different'. I hope there will be many more Lori and Max books in the future!



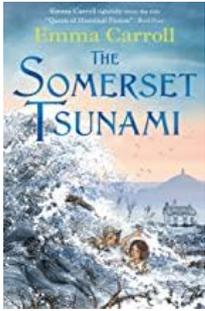
The Umbrella Mouse by Anna Fargher

Drawing on the true stories of animals caught up in the conflict of WWII, this debut novel won the 2019 Sainsbury's Book Prize for Fiction and was also a Waterstones Book of the Month selection. It is set in 1944, when young mouse Pip Hanway's safe world is turned upside down when her home, an umbrella shop in London, is destroyed by a bomb. Orphaned and alone, her perilous quest to find a new home becomes a bold journey across war-torn Europe. By chance she meets the members of Noah's Ark, a secret gang of animals fighting with the resistance in France, and alongside new friends Hans the German rat and GI Joe the homing pigeon, Pip becomes an intrepid figure fighting for good.



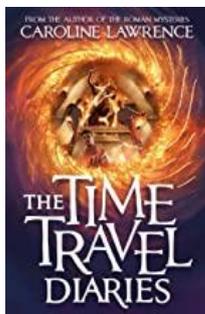
**The Secret Starling* by Judith Eagle

Clara has lived a life of solitude, home schooled under her mean uncle's strict regime, until the day he abandons Clara, leaving her with nothing but a wedge of 'guilt money' and a half empty, crumbling manor house. She is determined to do things her way for a change, so when streetwise Peter turns up, with his rescue cat and a surprising array of knowledge, she is sure that between them they have everything they need to survive. The more she learns however, the more she realises that absolutely *nothing* is as it seems. This wonderful adventure is filled with intrigue and surprising revelations! I do encourage as many boys (and other family members) to read it in preparation for a Family Book Club meeting next term. More details to follow!



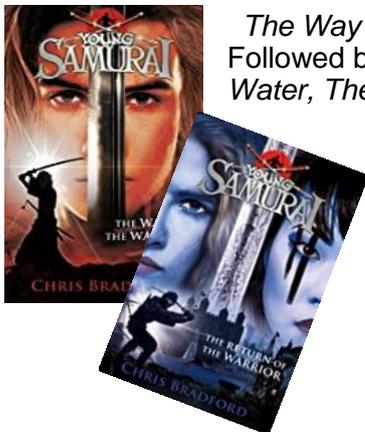
The Somerset Tsunami by Emma Carroll

Emma Carroll is the current Queen of children's historical fiction, and her latest book is really one of her best to date. Based on the true story of what recent research suggests was a tsunami in Somerset in 1607, this atmospheric tale weaves around witch finding and the deadly sugar trade as it follows Fortune Sharpe from her home on the North Somerset coast to the house of a rich merchant further up the coastline of the Bristol Channel. The characters are, as always with this author's books, brilliantly drawn...watch out for Dr Blood! Highly recommended.



The Time Travel Diaries by Caroline Lawrence

This highly experienced author is renowned for her deep knowledge of the Roman world, and her justly famous Roman Mysteries series are testament to that. This is the first in a brand new series that draws on that knowledge, but combines it with a touch of sci fi! Billionaire Solomon Daisy is obsessed with the skeleton of a blue eyed African girl from Roman London. When his tech guys accidentally invent a time machine he decides to send London schoolboy Alex Papas on a mission. Time travel is easier for children, and Alex knows Greek and a little Latin. The portable portal is placed in London's Mithraeum, recently relocated back to its original 3rd century AD site. Now all Alex has to do is go through and find the blue-eyed girl...



The Way of the Warrior by Chris Bradford

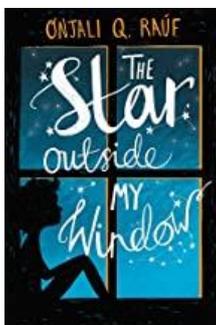
Followed by *The Way of the Sword*, *The Way of the Dragon*, *The Ring of Earth*, *The Ring of Water*, *The Ring of Fire*, *The Ring of Wind*, *The Ring of Sky* and *The Return of the Warrior*

When Jack Fletcher is shipwrecked off the coast of Japan in 1611, his father killed by ninja pirates, he is rescued by the legendary sword master Masamoto Takeshi and set to train as a samurai warrior. Yet life at the samurai school is hard, as Jack is picked on by bullies and treated as an outcast. This brilliant series has been around a while now, but I wanted to put it back on the list as a final book - *The Return of the Warrior* - has just been added to the series. Like the others in the series, it contains quite a lot of violence, because it was a violent world, but it is written with such authority (the author undertook Samurai training in order to write the series) that it is totally absorbing and believable.



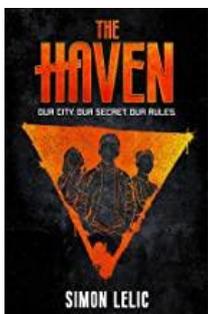
FloodWorld by Tom Huddleston

This dystopian novel offers a devastating picture of a future London reduced to chaos and violence by the effects of climate change and the greed of those in power who have created an underclass to bear the brunt of the devastation. It's a riveting adventure, shot through with insights into the abuse of power and how we choose to fight for justice. It's highly topical of course, and in the light of Greta Thunberg it seems totally believable that it is the young people in the story who lead by example. A terrific read, probably best suited to Upper School readers.



The Star outside My Window by Onjali Q. Rauf

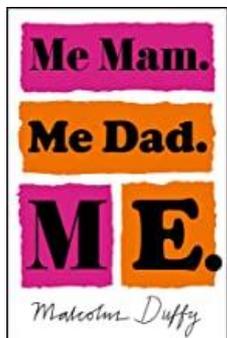
After the success of her award-winning debut novel, *The Boy at the Back of the Class*, this author has given us another book that uses the innocent voice of a child to explore a difficult issue – in this case the endless impact of domestic violence. Following the disappearance of her mum, 10-year-old Aniyah suddenly finds herself living in foster care. With her life in disarray, she knows just one thing for sure: her mum isn't gone for ever; she has become a star. So when a new star is spotted acting strangely in the sky, Aniyah is sure it's her mum, and she is determined that everyone else should know too... The topic is sensitively dealt with, and a young reader – like the protagonist – probably wouldn't understand the core of the book. This is why I feel that this book would be better for a slightly older reader (11+) who will find the book all the more moving.



The Haven by Simon Lelic

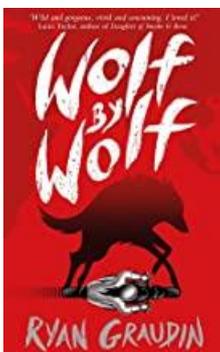
Followed by *Revolution* and *Deadfall* (Feb. 2020)

This is the first children's book from a well-known thriller writer and will be perfect for any lover of adventure, spies and action who is looking for a new series this Christmas. Alone and on the run, Ollie Turner has nowhere to hide until he is found by a secret organisation, far from adult eyes, called the Haven. Soon Ollie becomes one of the team battling to stop super-villain Maddy Sikes from destroying the entire city for her own ends. Time is running out for Ollie and his new friends, and millions of lives are at stake... (PS. For those readers familiar with the characters in *Oliver Twist*, try to spot the connections!)



Me Mam. Me Dad. Me. by Malcolm Duffy

I loved this unusual book, but I realise while writing that it is the second book about domestic violence in this list. I'm sorry to suggest such a depressing topic for holiday reading, but perhaps it is the sad background that gives the main characters their strength and, ultimately, makes these books so uplifting. As you can perhaps tell from the title, the book is set in the north of England and the main character, Danny, is a 14-year-old Geordie finding first love even as he recounts the trials and tribulations of family life. Danny's mam has a new boyfriend, Callum, who seems nice enough at first, but when cracks begin to show, and Danny witnesses Mam suffer, he decides to go in search of his Dad – the Dad he's never met... Definitely one for Year 8.



Wolf by Wolf by Ryan Graudin

Followed by *Blood for Blood*

Another book better suited to Year 8, this is a gripping thriller about one girl's mission to kill Hitler. The year is 1956, and the Axis powers of the Third Reich and Imperial Japan rule. To commemorate their Great Victory, they host an annual motorbike race across their combined continents, where the prize is an audience with the highly reclusive Adolf Hitler at the Victor's ball. Yael has witnessed too much suffering, and the five wolves tattooed on her arm are a constant reminder of the loved ones she lost when she was a prisoner in a brutal concentration camp. Now part of the resistance, Yael has one goal: win the race and kill Hitler. My only criticism of this fast-paced, clever story is that it leaves you on a bit of a cliff-hanger...so you'll just have to read the sequel too!